

## WHAT IS CLAIMED IS

1. A method for managing and tracking information items within an message-based system on a user system, the message-based system having a viewer, the method comprising  
5 the operations of:

(a) generating a thrask, the thrask including at least one information item having a set of metadata;

(b) sorting a new information item into the thrask in accordance with at least one criterion; and

10 (c) displaying the thrask and at least one of the metadata of one of the information items in the thrask in the viewer.

2. The method of Claim 1 further comprising the operation of:

15 (d) updating at least one of the metadata of one of the information items in the thrask.

3. The method of Claim 1 wherein operations (a), (b) and (c) are embedded in the message-based system.

20 4. The method of Claim 1 wherein an information item included in the thrask is either a message or a document.

5. The method of Claim 4 wherein the document originates from one of the following: a document attached to a message, a document residing on the user system or a document  
25 accessible by the user system.

6. The method of Claim 1 wherein metadata of an information item included in the thrask are task-related information.

7. The method of Claim 6 wherein the metadata of the information item include at least one of a deadline and a reminder.

8. The method of Claim 7 wherein operation (c) further comprises the operation of displaying a notification when a specified date for a reminder or a deadline arrives.

9. The method of Claim 7 wherein operation (c) further comprises the operation of displaying a dialog box when a specified date for a reminder or a deadline arrives, the dialog box allowing a user to select one of a plurality of options.

10. The method of Claim 7 wherein operation (c) further comprises the operation of displaying an indicator associated with the thrask for a nearest specified date for a deadline or a reminder associated with one of the information items in the thrask.

11. The method of Claim 10 wherein the indicator changes in appearance as the nearest specified date gets closer.

12. The method of Claim 1 wherein operation (a) is performed in response to a user action performed on an information item.

13. The method of Claim 12 wherein the viewer includes a thrask-viewing pane displaying a set of thrasks and wherein the user action comprises the action of manually dragging an information item into the thrask-viewing pane.

14. The method of Claim 1 wherein operation (a) comprises the operation of automatically generating a thrask when a predetermined criterion is satisfied.

15. The method of Claim 1 wherein operation (b) comprises the operation of automatically sorting a new message into the thrask when the new message is a response to a message already included in the thrask.

5 16. The method of Claim 1 wherein operation (b) is performed in response to a user action, the user action including the action of manually dragging an information item into a visual display of the thrask.

10 17. The method of Claim 1 wherein operation (b) comprises the operation of providing to the user a suggestion of which thrask to put the new information item into, when there is more than one thrasks.

15 18. The method of Claim 1 wherein the viewer comprises a thrask-viewing pane and an item list pane, and wherein operation (c) comprises the operation of displaying a set of thrasks in the thrask-viewing pane and of displaying in the item list pane a set of information items associated with a thrask selected from the set of thrasks.

20 19. The method of Claim 18 wherein the viewer further comprises a content viewing pane and wherein operation (c) further comprises the operation of displaying in the content viewing pane the content of an information item selected from a set of information items associated with a thrask selected from the set of thrasks.

25 20. The method of Claim 1 wherein operation (c) further comprises the operation of displaying a mark indicating an obligation associated with one of the information items in the thrask, the obligation being user-defined.

21. The method of Claim 1 wherein operation (c) further comprises the operation of displaying a group of marks indicating obligations associated with the thrask, the obligations

being user-defined, the marks corresponding to some of the information items included in the thrask.

22. The method of Claim 21 wherein, in the display of the group of marks, marks  
5 indicating obligations of the user are distinct from marks indicating obligations of correspondents of the user.

23. The method of Claim 1 wherein operation (c) comprises the operation of displaying,  
upon user selection of an option, all names that appear in the "From:", "To:" or "Cc:" lines of  
10 an information item that is associated with an obligation.

24. The method of Claim 1 wherein operation (c) further comprises the operations of:  
deferring a display of the thrask until a user-specified date in response to a user selection of a  
first deferral option; and  
15 deferring a display of an information item included in the thrask until a user-specified date in response to a user selection of a second deferral option.

25. The method of Claim 24 wherein operation (c) further comprises the operations of:  
displaying a deferred thrask in response to a user request to see the deferred thrask.; and  
20 displaying a deferred information item in a thrask in response to a user request to see the deferred information item.

26. A system for managing and tracking information items within a message-based system  
on a user system, the message-based system including an viewer, the system comprising:

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- (a) a thrask generating module generating a thrask, the thrask including at least one information item having a set of metadata;
  - (b) a sorting module sorting a new information item into the thrask in accordance with at least one criterion; and

(c) a display module displaying the thrask and at least one of the metadata of one of the information items in the thrask in the viewer.

27. The system of Claim 26 further comprising:

5 (d) an updating module updating at least one of the metadata of one of the information items in the thrask.

28. The system of Claim 26 wherein the thrask-generating module, the sorting modules and the display module are embedded in the message-based system.

10 29. The system of Claim 26 wherein an information item included in the thrask is either a message or a document.

15 30. The system of Claim 29 wherein the document originates from one of the following: a document attached to a message, a document residing on the user system or a document accessible by the user system.

20 31. The system of Claim 26 wherein metadata of an information item included in the thrask are task-related information.

32. The system of Claim 31 wherein the metadata of the information item include at least one of a deadline and a reminder.

25 33. The system of Claim 32 wherein the display module displays a notification when a specified date for a reminder or a deadline arrives.

34. The system of Claim 32 wherein the display module displays a dialog box when a specified date for a reminder or a deadline arrives, the dialog box allowing a user to select one of a plurality of options.

35. The system of Claim 32 wherein the display module displays an indicator associated with the thrask for a nearest specified date for a deadline or a reminder associated with one of the information items in the thrask.

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36. The system of Claim 35 wherein the indicator changes in appearance as the nearest specified date gets closer.

37. The system of Claim 26 wherein the thrask-generating module activates in response to a user action performed on an information item.

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38. The system of Claim 37 wherein the viewer includes a thrask-viewing pane displaying a set of thrasks and wherein the user action comprises the action of manually dragging an information item into the thrask-viewing pane.

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39. The system of Claim 37 wherein the thrask-generating module automatically generates a thrask when a predetermined criterion is satisfied.

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40. The system of Claim 26 wherein the sorting module automatically sorts a new message into the thrask when the new message is a response to a message already included in the thrask.

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41. The system of Claim 26 wherein the sorting module activates in response to a user action, the user action including the action of manually dragging an information item into a visual display of the thrask.

42. The system of Claim 26 wherein the sorting module provides to the user a suggestion of which thrask to put the new information item into, when there is more than one thrasks.

43. The system of Claim 26 wherein the viewer comprises a thrask-viewing pane and an item list pane, and wherein the display module displays a set of thrasks in the thrask-viewing pane and displays in the item list pane a set of information items associated with a thrask selected from the set of thrasks.

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44. The system of Claim 43 wherein the viewer further comprises a content viewing pane and wherein the display module displays in the content viewing pane the content of an information item selected from a set of information items associated with a thrask selected from the set of thrasks.

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45. The system of Claim 26 wherein the display module displays a mark indicating an obligation associated with one of the information items in the thrask, the obligation being user-defined.

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46. The system of Claim 26 wherein the display module displays a group of marks indicating obligations associated with the thrask, the obligations being user-defined, the marks corresponding to some of the information items included in the thrask.

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47. The system of Claim 46 wherein, in the display of the group of marks, marks indicating obligations of the user are distinct from marks indicating obligations of correspondents of the user.

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48. The system of Claim 26 wherein the display module displays, upon user selection of an option, all names that appear in the "From:", "To:" or "Cc:" lines of an information item that is associated with an obligation.

49. The system of Claim 26 wherein the display module defers a display of the thrask until a user-specified date in response to a user selection of a first deferral option and wherein the

display module defers a display of an information item included in the thrask until a user-specified date in response to a user selection of a second deferral option.

50. The system of Claim 49 wherein the display module displays a deferred thrask in  
5 response to a user request to see the deferred thrask and wherein the display module displays a deferred information item included in a thrask in response to a user request to see the deferred information item.